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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANAA 000672

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL SOCI YM IZ

SUBJECT: YEMEN: CURBING VOLUNTEERS FOR IRAQ

REF: SANAA 661

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES: AGMISENHEIMER FOR REASONS 1.5 B AND D

**¶11.** (C) BEGIN SUMMARY: Yemeni volunteers are being discouraged by the ROYG from joining the Iraqis in fighting against the coalition, although some volunteers will probably continue to make their way to Baghdad from intermediate stops in Damascus and Amman. END SUMMARY.

**¶12.** (C) The Yemeni government in recent days has taken steps to dissuade its citizens who wish to become "volunteer" fighters in Iraq. President Salih told Charge (reftel) April 5 that the flow of volunteers from Yemen -- as many as thirty thousand, Salih claimed -- has been stopped. Wire stories also are reporting that Yemeni authorities are preventing local volunteers from going to Baghdad to join the fight against coalition forces.

**¶13.** (C) TDY Pol/Econ Counselor April 5 called on one of Foreign Minister Al-Qirbi's aides, Abdel Hakim Al-Iryani, to underline USG views about Yemeni "volunteers" who may seek to join Iraqi forces in fighting against the coalition. Pol/Econ counselor noted we are expressing our view in various Arab capitals that the safety of such volunteers is a responsibility of their respective governments, and in the event that volunteers join the fighting, they will be considered as hostile elements. He added that the whole world had seen, on an Arab TV network that last week still had correspondents in Iraq, a large group of young men in Baghdad, identified as Yemeni volunteers, waving rifles and shouting pro-Saddam slogans.

**¶14.** (C) Smiling at the reference to Al-Jazeera, Al-Iryani said its correspondents have resumed working in Iraq. He added a "personal view" that the Yemenis in Baghdad who were shown on Al-Jazeera had not in fact made the trip to Iraq for the purpose of volunteering, but were drawn by the Iraqis from a rather substantial number of pro-Baathi Yemenis already in the country. He suggested that the sympathies of such Yemenis were already clear.

**¶15.** (C) Marking further ROYG distance from sponsorship for volunteers, Al-Iryani said that Yemeni authorities had in recent days stopped more than forty would-be volunteers from leaving Yemen, once it was confirmed that their purpose was to volunteer. Opposition parties are sniping at the government over this, he added. The difficulty for the Yemeni government, he said, was in determining the motives of travelers. There is a large number of Yemeni travelers going to Damascus and Amman all the time, and the ROYG cannot effectively sort out who is really going to volunteer -- but if it finds out that is their purpose, they will be stopped.

**¶16.** (C) Pol/ECON Counselor said that US-Yemeni cooperation in fighting terrorism in continuing despite differing perspectives of our governments about the war in Iraq. It would be unfortunate if some Yemeni volunteers were killed as a result of engagement in hostilities in Iraq, and more unfortunate if this led to unhappy families or vengeful tribes who might take actions in Yemen contrary to our mutual interests. Referring to the volunteers, Al-Iryani replied simply: They made their own choice.

**¶17.** (C) COMMENT: We are unable to estimate the number of would-be Yemeni volunteers, but Salih's thirty thousand figure (reftel) no doubt is hyperbole. It is noteworthy that the ROYG is actually stopping some volunteers, and to some extent exposing its Arab flanks to opposition critics in doing so. As Al-Iryani pointed out, however, some Yemeni travelers may still be finding their way to Baghdad, via Damascus and Amman, without the ROYG's blessing or protection.  
MISENHEIMER